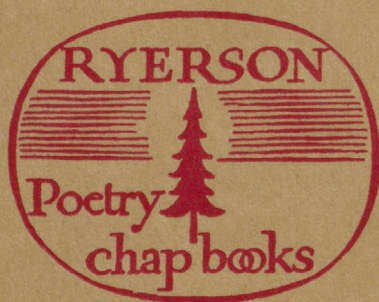


Recent Poems

GOODRIDGE MacDONALD



TORONTO • *The* RYERSON PRESS

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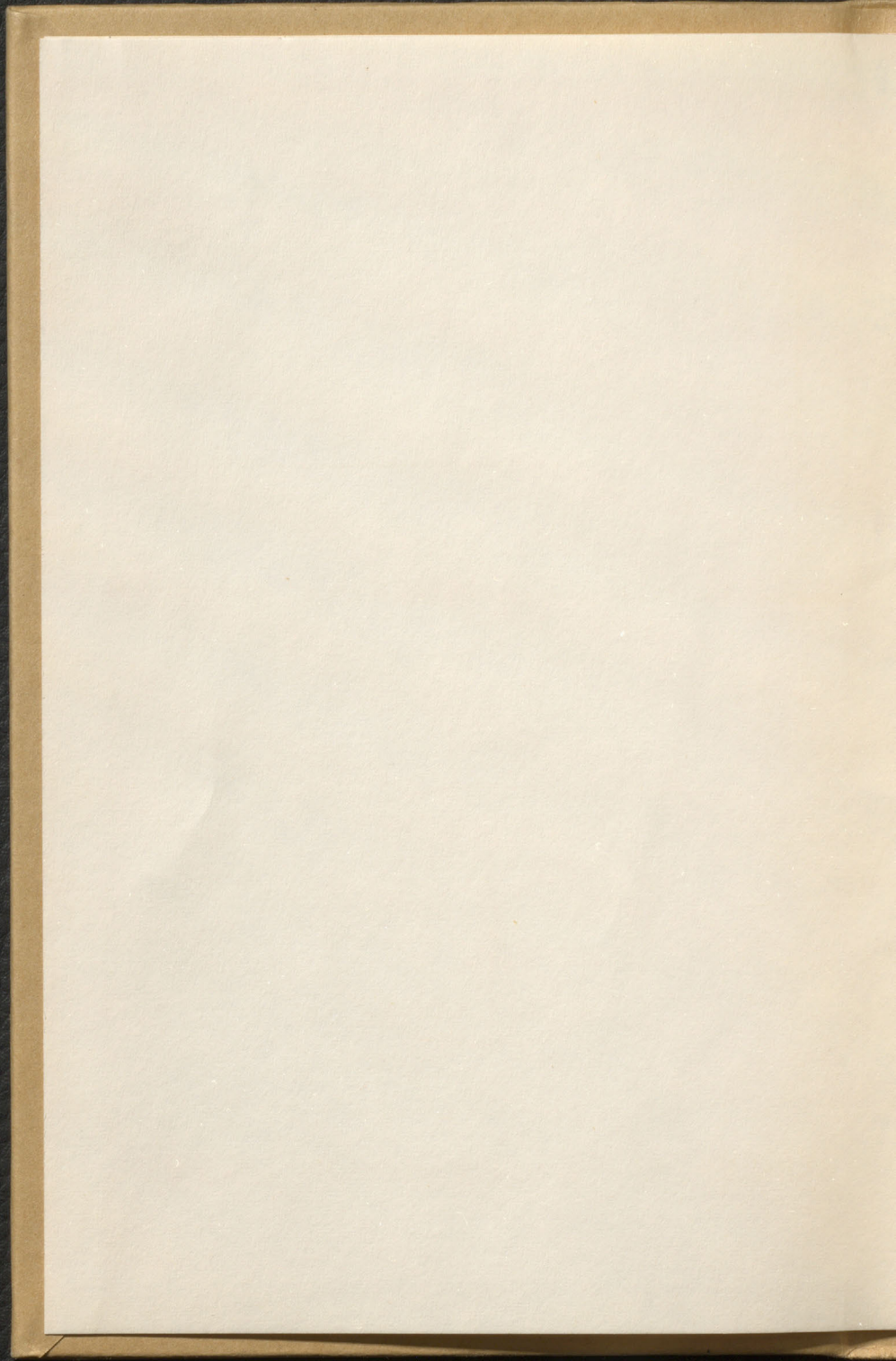
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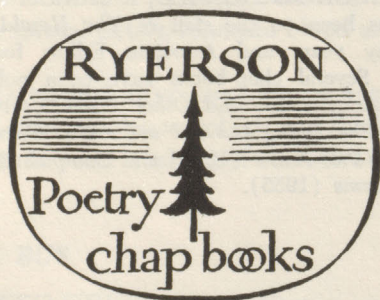


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Recent Poems

GOODRIDGE MacDONALD



TORONTO • *The* RYERSON PRESS

This is Chap-Book 170

OF THIS EDITION OF RECENT POEMS, BY GOODRIDGE
MacDONALD, TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY COPIES
ONLY HAVE BEEN PRINTED.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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GOODRIDGE MacDONALD, a native of Fredericton, N.B., has been on the staff of *The Herald*, Montreal, for many years and Associate Editor for the past decade. Several chap-books have been published, including *Armageddon and Other Poems* (privately published), *The Dying General and Other Poems* (1947), *Beggar Makes Music* (1950) and *Compass Reading and Other Poems* (1955).

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RECENT POEMS

TREE SCULPTURE

IN the soiled street, blossom unfolding petals;
Blood fountained in frigid form. (White iron burns,
And polished crystal slits the artery.)

Petal by petal, the cold Christ is released.
Stroke by stroke, the chisel has penetrated
Warm womb of wood, and the slow germinal

Of seed has now begun. (Where sap once sprang
Upward and outward, and the chill bird sang,
In mid-winter, a tangled ditty of spring.)

Fire wakes here where the chisel has bitten—
And whether Christ or Aphrodite bleeds,
Among the formal petals, fountain blood and flame.

Beware, O stranger! If you warm your fingers
A moment, they will be scorched; and the blood
Leaves stain beyond washing of corrosive years.

FROM THE BUS

ISOLATED HERE between glass,
Insulated among strangers, I perceive
You, as from a peak, a desert, or a wave;
A new view of the unknown city
Toward whose suburbs I make pilgrimage.

I consider this and that revealed ambiguity,
Discovering, from distance, new squares
And circles of delight, but no
Highway upon which my passport is valid.

The same parks and playing fields of fancy,
The same palaces and pleasure places, distract me.
— Far, as near, you are the city from which I am
debarred,
And no new view qualifies the exile.

THE MOCKING

(*In Memoriam, E.N.*)

On a March morning,
Poplars made grey smudge at street end;
Soiled cloud sheeted sky,
And each step woke
Idiot crackle of ice.

Then a cold knife was turned in the side;
The knife of the knowledge of death
(Yet blood did not flow).
I knew that at Vence,
France, a friend had died.

The hand was stilled,
The eye, lidded; their indentures
To beauty, terminated.
Corruption closeted in a casket
Cancelled the artist's skill.

—All, then, all metaphors,
All epigrams;
Pleas, panegyrics and denunciations,
Addressed to the queller of breath, became meaningless,
In the sound of the closing of doors.

Then were Paul and Millay put to mock;
Donne and Stevens — all the bright expositors:
Mocked by the cold knife,
The wind with its pressure of grave mould,
And the dead, who walk and walk.

LADY IN BLACK

AGAINST bottle-lit bar,
(No neon-sick colour,
But live light of liquor),
She of the mask-face, and angular gesture,
Posture of puppet,
Poses in vesture
Dark as her coal-dark hair;

(She, and the girl in green, and three
Attendant males — but only she.)

O, clown or queen? — And is the rite
Burlesque, or ballet? Dance, or sacrifice?
A mass, in this religious light?
And she, a priestess, offering
The stylized kiss, for bread;
The formalized caress?—
Watered wine of passion,
In the café fashion.

(O queen, my clown!)

Or is she symbol,
Doomed, and enduring? —
(Keats' urn; Or Mount Washington,
From plane at morning;
Or the Aldred Building,
Against November green?)

Pure in her priestly mime.

INLETS AND MIRRORS

A DREAM, of a memory, of a dream:—
How many times reflected from twin mirrors,
Dream and memory!

Three of us walking on the Digby shore
(An ebbtide beach, by estuary meeting
Inlet from the Basin; in turn,
Inlet of Fundy; inlet
And child of Ocean.) — Across sands
Moist with the last tide, thin, clear whistle
Came into our quiet talk;
Between words, the wistful asking
Of recollective, meditative bird,
Whose signature was printed upon sand.

And between words,
Others were with us who had gone away;
Whispering in the twilight, very near;
A very part of us, and of the night,
Between word and bird-note. And were with us
(Though we spoke of other things) when we
Turned townward from wet sand and alder brush.

Now one who walked
With us that night, has walked
Into the world of memory and dream;
And should we take the Digby shore again,
Surely he, too, would join us, between word
And bird-note. For even though
The Digby shore is far, and years are many,
Sometimes I am caught up with him
Into the interplay of mirrors.

If on some later evening, one shall go
Along the ebbtide beach, will I be numbered
Among the attendant company, having found
Reality of mirrors to exceed
That of the rubbed years?

A DREAM

"THIS will be hard," my uncle said;
"None of us is the same . . ."
I did not ask, nor need he name,
Cause or effect . . . (But he
Was changed, ah! changed deplorably!)
"This will be hard," he said.

Waking, I shivered, for I seemed to feel
The hound that bit him snuffling at my heel.

SACRAMENT

BEHOLD, a fragment of the apple tree
Whose death agonies I have witnessed
On an urban Calvary:

Torn from the True Cross, where God, deathless, died,
Life seeping from torn limb and gaping side.

A broken corpse, deep-rooted in its grave,
Fragment of trunk upright remains.
Limbs shattered, grasp to save,
By clasp of earth and grass, what must be given
To earth, and air, and heaven.

O, here the blood and bread,
The flesh and wine, are set
For my swift Eucharist, while yet
I look upon this fragment of the dead.

ILLUMINATION

LIGHT your house with candles,
Rather than bright orbs of love and knowing.

You will be the less distressed
When lights blow out as winter gale
Finds the cracks in your dwelling,
And only flickering starlight is to see by,
Or reflections (ambiguous) of forgotten suns.

Light modest tapers that your loss,
In that time, may be the less.

There's wise counsel! — But I
Would kindle pine torches, to send the hot light
Leaping high on wall and window,
With acrid smoke to bite the eye;
A fickle, flaring light for every room.

And if they set
The house ablaze, so that it all
Soon, soon is brought to ashes? — Why the ash
Will serve the priest for penitential marking
Upon a Lenten Wednesday.

PENCILS, A PEN—

RUSHING, all rushing, to one —
Eraser, pencils, pen, ashtray;
Lamp, fingers, memories, dreams,
Drawn together; fused.

Here in fusion find
End, and beginning:
Where there is no time, no separation,
There is neither end nor beginning.
They are where they are not;
I cannot find them, who am not.

Seeking symbols in the night sky,
I am caught in this swift conjunction;
This final reduction.

Here, the answer to all questions:
In a tree at evening, a cloud;
Pencils, a pen; eraser on the desk.

NOCTURNE

TWIN towers above the city and the night
irrelevant beyond the day stay way
why manifold the wreaking tube away
and alway ever uppermost delight:

Across the tavern table Charlie lies
pale lids laid petal-like upon the eyes
and loosely hung his inarticulate
lip lapsing; in a trickle of spilt beer
the cigarette from fingers flexlessly
relaxed disintegrates; his tangled hair

strays upon pallid brow and sideways turned
the weary head is couched on weary arm
the cap that held hair captive all forgot
rivalling the feet upon the floor; sleep well
lapped by the tavern turmoil incense-soothed
by breath of urine and stale beer sleep well:

Nor nights that we must go remembering
and there was once an unforgotten song
and a woman warm with all the warmth of night
twin towers above the city and the night
twin shadowed shuttered sabled.

ALL THINGS BURN

ALL things burn; burning white
snow consumes sun, alight
in grey, this December day:
— Never is the burning done.

At the street end, smoulder plumes
of poplar (and smoke-heavy hair
weighs upon hungry fingers) — smoke
of ash-white limbs.

Burn, burn, O fiery feet, to brand
memorial minutes, for a wind
awakes, that will disperse
dust from the burning about the universe.

FROM THE LOOKOUT

OCHRE cloud ingots, furnace heat upon them;
burnished planes of sky; mist that surges inward,
like smoky sea spume.

Ribbons of river, fragment of estuary, miniature
channel; splintered steel, and mirror shard. Where mist
lightens, the city

Patterns appear; green rectangle of copper,
strands of grey street, a tilted tower, charcoal trees;
glass to toss back

Occasional sun. As forms of cloud and river
mingle, as urban geometrics are undone,
the mist-wracked jig-saw

Fuses to single fluctuance; and I
compelled, a particle to magnet drawn, am hurled
and driven into all.

PROCLAMATION OF A PLANT

STRUGGLING for statement in form and green,
cries with contorted lips, and is unheard,
restricted not only by brick (unseen
under pinked foil), but by words

lacked from its lexicon; so that at last
the proclamation is indefinitely deferred;
foiled lips wither and waste;
green tongues tumble, innocent of word.

APPLE TREE

WHAT do I worship here? —
Strength that has outlived storm?
Harmonious design
Of twisted limb on limb? —
Far roots, reaching out into earth?

Or is it the futile searching
Of fumbling roots, and limbs
Leafless, like metal, corroded? —

This place is consecrate
To life, and death, and frustration,
And my fingers touch with reverence
The dying apple tree.

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